

American

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Vice President Biden Discusses U.S. Nuclear Agenda*Outlines plans for preventing nuclear weapons spread*

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.

Staff Writer

Washington — Vice President Biden says the United States will do everything in its power to keep nuclear weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists or spreading to states that do not already have them.

But Biden also emphasized that the United States recognizes that as its own technology improves, researchers are developing non-nuclear ways to deter potential adversaries without relying on the nuclear weapons deterrence that characterized the Cold War period of the 20th century.

"The spread of nuclear weapons is the greatest threat facing the country and, I would argue, facing humanity," Biden said in a February 18 speech at the National Defense University in Washington. "And that is why we're working both to stop their proliferation and eventually to eliminate them."

"But until that day comes, we have to do everything in our power to maintain our national arsenal and make sure it's reliable," he added.

Biden outlined the plan for implementing President Obama's nonproliferation and nuclear security agenda, and also addressed budget needs and other efforts to support the president's vision of reducing nuclear dangers worldwide.

In April 2009 in Prague, Obama laid out a vision for protecting the United States from nuclear threats, but also made clear that he was seeking a world free of nuclear weapons. Biden said the Obama administration is working to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to gain ratification in the U.S. Senate for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which was designed to keep emerging nuclear states from perfecting their arsenals and prevent rivals from pursuing more advanced weapons systems.

In his speech, Biden said nuclear research laboratories and the Defense Department have been developing capabilities like an adaptive missile defense shield, conventional warheads with worldwide reach and other systems that will enable the United States to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in its national security arsenal.

Obama asked Congress for \$7 billion in the fiscal year 2011 federal budget to maintain the existing nuclear stockpile while also modernizing the U.S. nuclear infrastructure, which includes U.S. research and

development laboratories operated by the U.S. Energy Department. The request represents a \$624 million increase from the current fiscal year's budget, which runs from October 1, 2009, to September 30, 2010, and includes spending an additional \$5 billion for those projects over the next five years.

"This investment is not only consistent with a nonproliferation agenda, we argue it's essential to pursue a nonproliferation agenda," Biden said. "Guaranteeing our stockpile, coupled with broader research and development efforts, allows us to pursue deeper nuclear reductions, without in any way compromising our security."

One of the most significant factors in nuclear weapons research by the United States has been its ability to conduct testing through the Stockpile Stewardship Program, which does not require underground, atmospheric or underwater explosions, Biden said. The program was launched 18 years ago by President George H.W. Bush when he signed a nuclear-testing moratorium enacted by Congress.

The United States and Russia are negotiating a new arms agreement that would succeed the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START I, which expired December 5, 2009. Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev tentatively agreed in July 2009 to seek a new treaty that reduces existing arsenals to between 1,500 and 1,675 warheads each. Talks paused during December 2009 for the holidays and resumed late last month in Geneva.

Under Secretary of State Ellen Tauscher told reporters recently that the two sides are quite close to reaching an accord.

Biden said that the president will host a Global Nuclear Security Summit April 12-13 in Washington to advance his goals of securing all vulnerable nuclear materials within four years. "It's a very high priority. We cannot wait; we cannot wait for an act of nuclear terrorism before coming together to share the best practices and raise security standards," he said.

And in May "we will participate in a Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference. We are rallying support for stronger measures to strengthen inspection and to punish cheaters," Biden added.

Rebuilding Haiti May Cost \$14 Billion, Study Shows

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.

Staff Writer

Washington — A preliminary study by Inter-American Development Bank economists indicates that it could cost as much as \$14 billion to rebuild Haiti's homes, schools,

roads and other structures damaged by a devastating earthquake in January.

"The earthquake, which hit about 15 kilometers (10 miles) southwest of the capital city, Port-au-Prince, was followed by several strong aftershocks and has caused significant loss of human life, hundreds of thousands of people displaced and severe damages to the economic infrastructure of the country," the team of economists said in the report released February 16 in Washington.

"The study confirms that the Haitian earthquake is likely to be the most destructive natural disaster in modern times, when viewed in relation to the size of Haiti's population and its economy," the development bank said.

The preliminary report is based on complex comparisons with nearly 2,000 other natural disasters around the world between 1970 and 2008; it factored in the number of dead and missing in Haiti — believed to be between 200,000 and 250,000 people. A more detailed accounting of the cost of reconstruction — which is being conducted by the development bank, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme — will be completed in several months, the IADB said.

The Haitian government estimates the number of dead at 230,000 people, according to the development bank. The number of people displaced in the Port-au-Prince area is estimated at 700,000, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) says.

The development bank study by economists Eduardo Cavallo, Andrew Powell and Oscar Becerra estimated that reconstruction costs could be as low as \$8.1 billion or as high as \$13.9 billion. "These estimates are useful to put this event into perspective and to inform the international community of the enormity of the challenge that lies ahead in the task of reconstructing Haiti," the authors wrote.

"This sum will be beyond the scope of one agency or one bilateral donor, and so donor coordination will be key in any reconstruction effort," they added. "The implications of such an estimate are significant. Raising such a figure will require many donors, bilateral, multilateral and private."

The number of deaths is staggering for a country with a population of about 9 million, the authors said. But compounding the loss of life is that the magnitude 7.0 earthquake was centered in the Caribbean nation's capital city — Haiti's center of commerce, government and communications.

U.S. COMMITMENT

The United States, which began offering humanitarian assistance almost immediately, has already committed almost \$600 million to Haitian relief and reconstruction efforts, according to USAID and Defense Department reports. President Obama is expected to request special funding for reconstruction of at least \$1 billion from Congress soon, according to news accounts.

A worldwide donors' conference is being planned for late March or early April, and most expectations are that the commitment will be for at least a decade.

In announcing an initial \$100 million commitment to Haiti's relief effort January 14, Obama pledged to the Haitian people that "you will not be forsaken. You will not be forgotten."

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, the United States rushed in a total of 13,000 U.S. military personnel to distribute food, provide shelter, help run the airport, provide medical assistance and support the Haitian government's rescue efforts, according to Army Lieutenant General Ken Keen, the deputy commander of the U.S. Southern Command and the commander of the joint task force in Haiti. Keen was in Port-au-Prince at the time of the earthquake and was placed in charge of the U.S. relief effort by the president.

At a February 17 Pentagon briefing, Keen said that as the civilian assistance increases, "we see the need for our military assistance dwindling. However, at the present time, there's still great need across the board, and we still remain decisively engaged, providing critical assistance to the government of Haiti and all the organizations."

On February 16, U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk announced a plan to encourage U.S. clothing manufacturers and retailers to help rebuild Haiti by importing 1 percent of their apparel production from the earthquake-ravaged country. Haiti's clothing sector accounted for about 75 percent of the country's exports and employed more than 25,000 Haitians before the earthquake.

U.S. trade officials hope a vigorous response to the Plus 1 Percent program would encourage investors to get Haitian clothing factories back into operation as quickly as possible. The United States and Haitian governments are working with U.S. and Haitian companies to remove roadblocks to Haitian apparel exports, Kirk's office said.

Sanctions Proposals Offer Options for U.S. Policy on Iran

Although the president makes final decisions, Congress has its say

By Jeff Baron
Staff Writer

Washington — While the United States prods other governments to impose tougher sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program, some members of the U.S. Congress are prodding the U.S. government to do the same.

Each house of Congress has passed a proposal that would impose a wide array of sanctions against Iran and people or companies that do business with it. The versions in each chamber are slightly different and must be reconciled before being sent to the president. Among the provisions in the bills:

- Sanctions would cover any person or company that helps Iran import gasoline or other petroleum products or that helps the country expand its refineries.
- The trade of most products between the United States and Iran, except for food and medicine imported by Iran, would be banned.
- A broad range of financial companies would be prohibited from backing business deals involving Iran.
- Companies that do business with Iran's energy sector or that provide equipment with which Iran restricts communications would be barred from doing business with the U.S. government.
- Assets belonging to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and other Iranians involved in abuses of human rights, nuclear arms and terrorism would be frozen. The U.S. Treasury Department already announced a similar policy, acting against a Revolutionary Guard-controlled corporation and its commander.

"The President of the United States has rightly adopted a two-track policy, in my view, of engagement backed by the prospect of further sanctions, and I support his approach," said a statement from Senator Chris Dodd of Connecticut, chairman of the Senate Banking Committee and one of the bill's main sponsors. "Our legislation strengthens what has come to be known as the 'pressure track.'

"We must send a clear signal to Iran's leaders that, if they continue to defy the will of the international community, our nation is prepared to confront them on that."

Senate leaders said a final bill also should include other financial penalties and visa restrictions for Iranian officials who have abused human rights. An additional proposal, offered by two Republican senators but not passed, would support efforts within Iran to replace the government.

The proposals go further than the current policy of the Obama administration. But they suggest how members of Congress support or try to influence U.S. foreign policy.

Patrick Clawson, an Iran specialist and deputy director of research at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said members of Congress are not trying to confront the administration over its approach to Iran. American politicians traditionally tend to limit their public disagreements with their president on issues of foreign policy, a principle expressed by a long-ago senator who declared, "Politics stops at the water's edge." What's more, with Congress and the White House controlled by the same political party, Clawson said, the two institutions tend to cooperate.

As Clawson noted, the tough sanctions imposed on Libya and Iran in 1996 were approved by a Republican Congress and sent to a Democratic president, Bill Clinton. But Clawson said this Congress, despite the skepticism of some Republicans, accepted the approach President Obama set when he took office: an effort to engage the Iranian government in discussions to lessen the threat of its nuclear program, with the threat of what Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in April called "crippling" sanctions if it did not respond to diplomacy. On February 16, during a visit to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, she said of the sanctions that the United States and others are seeking at the United Nations: "We want to send a clear message that it's not about the Iranian people; this is about the Revolutionary Guard."

Congress is not trying to force action by the Obama administration but is trying to give it a greater range of options in acting against Iran, Clawson said. "It's not Congress saying, 'You've got to do this,'" he said. "It's Congress saying that 'we want you to have this arrow in your quiver.'"

The option that has gotten the most attention is the proposal to clamp down on the flow of gasoline to Iran, which exports oil but relies on imports of refined petroleum products.

Hadi Ghaemi, director of the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, a U.S.-based nongovernmental advocacy group, said a gasoline embargo or any other broad economic sanctions would be wrong and counterproductive. "We are broadly against any sanctions that hurt the Iranian people," he said.

Ghaemi said an action such as a gasoline embargo would cause suffering among Iranians generally while strengthening the position of the Revolutionary Guard, which would control the smuggling routes from Iran's neighbors. He compared the situation to that of Iraq in the 1990s, where he said sanctions caused suffering among

the Iraqi people.

Any sanctions, Ghaemi said, must be “targeted” and “carefully researched.”

“Punish government and government officials for its policies, not the people. That is collective punishment,” he said.

Clawson said the sanctions bills would not require the Obama administration to use a gasoline embargo. And he said the approach already under way — of sanctions against the Revolutionary Guard and its leaders — is supported in Congress as well.

The legislation also serves as a reminder that Congress wants to be consulted about Iran. “Congress wants the administration to talk about the options,” Clawson said.

Ghaemi said the only effective sanctions are those taken by the international community, not the United States alone. He said U.S. sanctions that have been in place against Iran for decades have caused that country some problems but have failed to influence the regime in Tehran.

In the long run, Ghaemi said, international sanctions — whether imposed over the nuclear issue or over human rights violations — make sense for the future of Iran and for the interests of nations that want to do business with a stable Iran.

Once in Danger of Disappearing, U.S. Gullah Culture Now Thrives

Individuals, government initiatives help support Gullah traditions

By Yvette Ridenour

Special Correspondent

Washington — In the Gullah culture, there is an expression that goes, “If you don’t know where you’re going, you should know where you came from.” Proud Gullah communities along the coast of the southeastern United States are determined to make sure that future generations never forget where they came from.

For the past decade, many people of Gullah heritage have been attempting to preserve a way of life that was in danger of extinction. Today, the language, spirituality and traditions of Gullah culture are being celebrated more than ever before.

Descendants of West Africans brought as slaves to America some 300 years ago, the Gullah have preserved more of their African linguistic and cultural heritage than any other African-American community in the United States. The Lowcountry region of South Carolina and

Georgia, including the coastal plain and Sea Islands, is home to most of the approximately 300,000 Gullah people, with smaller groups in North Carolina and Florida.

Forced to work as slaves in rice plantations on harsh barrier islands that were isolated from the mainland, they developed a strong sense of family and community and maintained a separate, English-based creole language. Their West African heritage has been blended with American customs not only in language, but in their arts and crafts, religious beliefs, folklore, rituals, dress, cuisine and music.

“As recently as 2001, there was a real possibility that Gullah culture would fade away,” said James Mitchell, president and chief executive officer of the Native Island Business and Community Affairs Association. “But there have been a number of initiatives, including festivals and our celebration, as well as legislation in 2006 to create a Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. These things have gone a long way to bring attention to Gullah culture on a national level.” (Geechee, another name for the Gullah people, is a term more commonly used in Georgia.)

Mitchell, a descendant of slaves who formed the first freedmen township in the United States in 1862 on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, oversees the annual Hilton Head Island Gullah Celebration, which is hosted by the Native Island association every February. It is one of several Gullah cultural festivals held every year throughout the Lowcountry.

Increasingly, Gullah traditions are being celebrated — and researched — across the United States. For instance, the Black Cultural Center at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, maintains a bibliography of Gullah publications, and Metro State College in Denver, Colorado, recently hosted a conference on Gullah culture.

PRESERVING GULLAH LEGACY

As coastal development has increased, many Gullahs have been forced off their ancestral lands, and their traditions of fishing and hunting for survival have been replaced in large part by a resort-driven economy. Since 1956, when the bridge to Hilton Head was built, the Gullah world has become less isolated, and preserving the culture is more difficult.

Starting in 2000, the U.S. National Park Service conducted a four-year study to determine how Gullah communities could be galvanized to preserve their special legacy. Michael Allen of the Park Service, himself a Gullah, says that thanks to the study and to the passage of the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Act by Congress in

2006, the possibility of this culture disappearing is “far less of a danger.” The act provides \$1 million a year, for 10 years, to set up the Gullah/Geechee Heritage Corridor, which will help preserve Gullah culture and encourage heritage tourism.

According to Representative James Clyburn of South Carolina, who introduced the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Act, legislation was needed because “the Gullah/Geechee culture is the last vestige of the fusion of African and European languages and traditions brought to these coastal areas.”

“There was a time when people were ashamed of their Gullah culture because it was perceived as backward and uneducated,” Allen said, “but Gullahs have amazing skills embedded in their DNA. [U.S. first lady] Michelle Obama has Gullah roots, and people are seeing that they have great reason to celebrate the culture, not to be ashamed of it.” U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and boxer Joe Frazier are two other prominent citizens with Gullah ancestry.

The month-long Hilton Head Island Gullah Celebration coincides with Black History Month in the United States. In 2009, about 6,000 people attended the celebration, and this year organizers expect more than 10,000. Among the featured arts and crafts are net knitting, indigo dye making and sweetgrass basket making. There are plenty of opportunities to try Gullah cuisine — such as stewed oysters, conch stew, and shrimp and grits — and traditional gospel “praise and shout” music rings through the historic churches.

The celebration will conclude with the Marsh Tacky Run, a race featuring Marsh Tacky workhorses, which played a huge role in the survival of Gullahs on Hilton Head. These horses, descended from horses left behind by Spanish explorers, were traditionally raced at Christmas time. “They would have horse races to see who had bragging rights,” Mitchell said.

AN AMBASSADOR FOR THE GULLAH

Storytelling is an important way that Gullah history is communicated to young people. Marquetta Goodwine, who claims the title “Queen Quet, chieftess of the Gullah/Geechee Nation,” is a renowned storyteller and founder of the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition. She has testified before the United Nations about the need to preserve her culture and is an enthusiastic ambassador for Gullahs.

Goodwine is a strong voice encouraging Gullahs to hold on to their native land. “If I were to take and sell the land,” she said in a television interview, “it was as if I was taking my entire family and putting them again on the

auction block. Whenever I’m out in the field, when I’m planting things, when I’m harvesting things, I feel all of them in that field still with me.”

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